

**michael
lekakis**



In one of his charming poem-letters to Ezra Pound, E. E. Cummings mentions "a singularly honest Greek sculptor [Michael Lekakis]." "*Le dit sculptor*" (as Cummings has it), friend to both Cummings and Pound, has devoted nearly all of his sixty-six years to the quiet creation of an immense and spectacular sculptural world. His first one-man exhibition was held in 1941 at the Artists' Gallery in New York, but the notable reception of his bronzes at that time was lost almost at once in the ensuing war years. He was "discovered" in 1963, having produced a considerable body of work, by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and he exhibited his sculptures there in the group show "Americans 1963."

Working mostly in wood, Lekakis construes the balanced forms he produces dynamically in terms of some intuited organizing force inhering in the materials with which he begins. He has occasionally, in fact, actually groomed a small stand of trees near his Long Island studio so that the living wood develops in sculpturally promising forms and yields a clear sense of the very force that drives them. The resulting biomorphic forms are of an endless variety and boldness and wit. Lekakis thus commits himself to a generous vision of the symbiotic relation between human art and the art of the cosmos—which is at once sympathetic to Platonic doctrines and is idealized in his *Apotheosis*.

The monumental *Apotheosis* is possibly Lekakis' most daring effort so far. Carved from three trees and their single root system which have been inverted and placed on a pedestal, this sculpture takes the breathless and ritualized form of three figures dancing upon an altar, supporting the cosmos. Lekakis says he saw the possibilities of the original wood almost at a stroke and was seized with such a strenuous need to work them out at once that he nearly jeopardized his health.

Lekakis believes that he is articulating the dynamic forms embedded in the natural materials he selects. In this sense, the artist's effort embodies a certain natural piety and curiosity which seeks to respect and understand the forces that produce the distinction of every living thing; also, it conveys the power of human intelligence, informed by a deeper empathy for life itself, to imitate the creative energies of nature or—perhaps more accurately, from Lekakis' view—to render those energies more explicit and less obstructed. He takes great care, therefore, not to impose any preconceived design on the wood he works with, but to serve it by sensing its ideal possibilities.

Lekakis has evolved a strategy of applying a system of geometric forms to the roots and branches he starts with. This allows him at once to organize the space of the original structure and release its vital rhythm and distinctive biomorphic system. He selects the freest, most productive controls, the least artificial constraints, such as spirals, tetrahedrons, pentahedrons, spheres, cubes and the like, and he reduces his given materials with their own random forms to an intuitively appropriate system of geometrized sections.

I have seen all but a few of Lekakis' pieces, and among this very large group of biomorphic forms, there is not a single one that is not distinctly and uncannily organismic and alive. The secret of his technique lies in his having selected models for his analytic sectioning such as his favorite tetrahedral forms, for instance, which convey pulsing rhythms—they appear to open and close in a way that combines maximal opposition and harmony. The spacing and scale of these forms, then, enable us to see the spine of the piece, the very mode of life of the new organism.

Joseph Margolis



Rythmos, 1973
Wood
91½ x 29½ x 27

Catalogue of the Exhibition

All works are lent by the artist unless otherwise listed. Measurements are in inches, height preceding width and depth. The medium is wood.

*Each of these pieces has a history of work over a period of years. Some have been exhibited and reworked; therefore, exact dating is difficult.

1. *Sympan*, 1960. 86 x 28 x 26. Collection Whitney Museum of American Art; Gift of the Friends of the Whitney Museum of American Art (and purchase).
2. *Aiora*, 1966-67. 20 x 71 x 18.
3. *Aspis Achilléoy's Epi Váthroy*, 1973. 58 x 24 x 28.
4. *Nike*, 1973. 74½ x 27 x 19.
- *5. *Apotheosis*, 1973. 117½ x 49 x 62.
- *6. *Eros Psyche Number 2*, 1973. 78½ x 35 x 18.
- *7. *Rythmos*, 1973. 91½ x 29½ x 27.

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